

Governor Jack Markell and Lt. Governor Matt Denn Unveil Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan visits, highlights President Obama's Preschool for All proposal

Wilmington, DE – Governor Jack Markell and Lt. Governor Matt Denn presented [a long-term, strategic plan](#) today to strengthen and sustain Delaware's early childhood system. Developed by the [Delaware Early Childhood Council](#), the plan focuses on whole-child development, family engagement and community collaboration to reach milestones and meet established goals over the next five years.



“One of the most important investments we can make is in our state's youngest children,” said Governor Markell. “Our vision is to create the nation's finest early childhood system where quality programs prepare all of our children for success in a competitive, global economy. Early childhood development is fundamental not only to later educational success but virtually all facets of a child's health, prosperity and quality of life. Studies show: children

receiving quality early care and education are more likely to be successful in school, become better citizens, earn greater wages, contribute more to their communities and require government support. Education is not only our moral obligation – our state’s economic future depends on it.”

The plan includes four strategic goals:

1. **A Healthy Start for All Children:** create an environment where Delaware children become the healthiest in the nation—physically, emotionally, and behaviorally.
2. **High-Quality Early Childhood Programs and Professionals:** provide all Delaware children with access to high-quality early childhood programs and professionals.
3. **An Aligned and Effective Early Learning System, Birth Through Third Grade:** create a system that enables all children to arrive at school ready and eager to succeed and prepares K-12 schools to further enrich their early learning.
4. **Sustainable System Improvement:** develop and sustain policies, programs and partnerships that address the comprehensive developmental needs of all children.

“There is work going on in classrooms all over this state that is not only exciting, but also critically important,” said Lt. Governor Denn. “We are creating a comprehensive early childhood system that serves all children and families in our state and, in doing so, Delaware has the opportunity to change the future in a fundamental and enduring way – to impact the lives of children and their families for generations to come.”

Accompanying the four strategic goals are strategies and objectives for implementation. They include: strengthening young child developmental screening and access to health services; ramping up participation in Delaware Stars, the state’s quality rating and improvement system for early childhood providers; offering professional development and

wage enhancements for early childhood teaching professionals; and building bridges between the early childhood system and the K-12 system using cross sector professional development and the Delaware Early Learner Survey at Kindergarten entry.



“This strategic plan charts a clear path for us to follow,” said Jennifer Ranji, Secretary of the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families. “This work has intensified in focus and momentum in recent years and this plan will further accelerate that activity.

If we help children succeed when they’re young, we can make the hurdles they face more surmountable and their full potential achievable. We owe them our best efforts.”

“This initiative is about community ownership,” added Dan Rich, Chairman of the Delaware Early Childhood Council. “Mobilization of partnerships across all sectors is the key to sustainability. This strategic plan was developed over the last year by the Delaware Early Childhood Council with the participation of hundreds of stakeholders across the state. The Interagency Resources Management Committee (IRMC) with the enthusiastic support of all three relevant Cabinet Secretaries – Children’s Department Secretary Jennifer Ranji, Education Secretary Mark Murphy and Health and Social Services Secretary Rita Landgraf then recommended the plan to the Governor. We are grateful for the participation of our partners and their commitment to our implementation efforts going forward.”

Today’s unveiling occurred immediately following a visit by U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan, who toured St. Michael’s School and Nursery to observe its early learning program. He also joined the Governor, Lt. Governor and Delaware’s Congressional delegation to highlight President Obama’s [Preschool for All proposal](#) to expand access to high quality

preschool for all children. The President's 2014 budget proposes \$75 billion over 10 years to create new partnerships with states to provide high-quality preschool for all four-year olds. Funding would be provided to states and distributed to local school districts, or local school districts in partnership with other early learning providers, to offer high-quality preschool programs. An additional \$750 million would provide competitive grants to states to strengthen their early learning systems.

"Under the leadership of Governor Markell, his education team and many others across the state, Delaware is setting a high bar for educational achievement and better outcomes," said U.S. Sen. Tom Carper. "Focusing on early education is fundamental to student success and building a first-class workforce that is ready to take on the challenges of the 21st century."

"In child after child, we've seen proof that early education results in kids who are better prepared for the classroom and ultimately more successful in school and in life," U.S. Sen. Chris Coons said. "Developing and implementing a long-term strategic plan shows real leadership and commitment to investing in our kids and ensuring they have every opportunity to succeed. When we invest in our kids, we invest in our own future."



Building a strong foundation for Delaware's education system is a top priority for this administration. In 2011, with the support of the General Assembly, the State [invested \\$22M in early childhood education](#). Later that year the [state won an additional \\$50M](#) in the federal Early Learning Challenge grant competition that will allow Delaware to significantly increase

the number of early childhood programs participating and attaining the highest levels of quality in Delaware Stars – the state’s quality rating and improvement system for early childcare and education programs. Those funds will also support efforts to grow the percentage of low-income children in child care enrolled in quality-rated early learning programs. In addition, an annual investment of \$1.9 million will allow 10,000 Delaware students to participate in Delaware’s [World Language Immersion Program](#) over the next decade. Students enrolled in the program spend half their school day learning science, social studies and math in either Mandarin Chinese or Spanish.

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Photos from today’s events are [available on Flickr](#).